

**GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
PLANNING
LOK SABHA**

UNSTARRED QUESTION NO:2968
ANSWERED ON:05.09.2007
RESERVATION IN EDUCATION FIELD
Singh Shri Mohan

Will the Minister of PLANNING be pleased to state:

- (a) whether the National Knowledge Commission has opposed the implementation of reservation in the education field;
- (b) if so, the details thereof and the reaction of the Government thereto;
- (c) whether the policy of implementation of reservation for the backward, weaker section and dalit communities at every stage of education is proposed to be withdrawn; and
- (d) if so, the details thereof alongwith the reasons therefor?

Answer

MINISTER OF THE STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF PLANNING (SHRI M.V.RAJASEKHARAN)

(a) to (d): The National Knowledge Commission in Section VII of its Recommendations says that it is essential that access to education for economically and historically socially underprivileged students is enhanced in a substantially more effective manner. The NKC has also recommended a deprivation index covering economic backwardness, poverty, caste and community backwardness, social indicators such as family education history, place of residence, type of school attended, physical disability etc. for affirmative action.

Extracts from the Note on Higher Education of the National Knowledge Commission referred to reply to Parts (a) to (d) of Lok Sabha Unstarred Question No. 2968 due for reply on 5.9.2007.

Education is an essential mechanism for inclusion through the creation of social opportunities. It is, therefore, essential that in addition to ensuring that no student is denied the opportunity to participate in higher education due to financial constraints, access to education for economically and historically socially underprivileged students is enhanced in a substantially more effective manner.

Economic barriers to higher education can be addressed by ensuring financial viability for all students wanting to enter the world of higher education. This can be done through two strategies. One is to adopt a needs blind admissions policy. This would make it unlawful for educational institutions to take into account any financial factor while deciding whether or not to admit a student. Every institution will be free to use a variety of instruments to achieve this aim: scholarships or cross-subsidies. In addition, academic institutions would be able to set a fee of their own choice subject to the provision that there are at least two banks that are willing to finance the entire cost of education at that institution, without any collateral other than the fact of admission. The cost of education includes not just fees but also reasonable living expenses including costs such as hostel and mess fees and any other expenses associated with the course of study. Since commercial banks may be wary of funding economically deprived students, especially in non-professional courses, we need a well-funded and extensive National Scholarship Scheme targeting economically underprivileged students and students from historically socially disadvantaged groups, particularly students from rural and backward areas. The success of this proposal depends on generous government support. For instance, the government should endeavour to make available about 100,000 scholarships for such students. These scholarships should be set at a level where students are empowered to go to any institution of their choice.

We also need to undertake more proactive forms of affirmative action to ensure inclusion of marginal and excluded groups. Reservations are essential but they are a part, and one form of, affirmative action. Disparities in educational attainments are related to caste and social groups, but are also strongly related to other indicators such as income, gender, region and place of residence. Access to quality higher education is further limited for students from certain types of schools. Therefore deprivation of educational opportunities is a multi-dimensional problem and attention needs to be paid to different salient levels of deprivation faced by students. A meaningful and comprehensive framework would account for the multidimensionality of differences that still persist. Such a deprivation index could provide weighted scores to students and the cumulative score could be used to supplement a student's school examination score. After adding the score from the deprivation index, all students could compete for admissions.

The indicators need to be easily identifiable and verifiable for the system to work effectively. They should cover the different types of disadvantages that a student could face at the school level, and while applying for admissions to higher education. This system serves the dual purpose of considering various disadvantages and ensuring that a reserved category student who has otherwise enjoyed other benefits does not get great preference at the time of admissions.

Illustrative indicators of backwardness that need to be measured by such an index could include social background covering caste (keeping in view regional variations), religion and gender, family education history; family income, type of school distinguishing between government and private schools and between schools from different locations, the medium of instruction, place of residence distinguishing between urban and rural areas and accounting for regional deprivation by sorting districts along an index of infrastructure or access to social benefits and physical disability.